

USAID INSIGHT

June 1 - International Children's Day

INNOVATIVE THEATER TEACHES TOLERANCE

“You always have to be difficult! When it comes to collecting money for an exam, your mother is unavailable. She has money to buy you mini skirts, but never for flowers for the teacher!” The raised voice is that of a “teacher” scolding a “child” in a student theater improvisation of *The Black Sheep*, staged by fellow students for a Makiyivka school. It depicts a teacher humiliating a student before his peers by commenting on his poor financial standing, an all too common situation in this region.

According to an *Amnesty International* public opinion poll, school children in the town of Makiyivka, located in Donetsk Oblast, believe their rights are systematically violated by teachers: 75% reported that teachers discriminate against students of poor financial standing; 80% stated that teachers verbally belittle and disrespect students in school; 56% said teachers physically humiliate them and; 36% of the students questioned said teachers comment on their private lives and openly announce confidential medical information while classes are in session. Teachers' response to the survey results was unanimous: “This happens, but not in my classroom.”

Luckily for the town of Makiyivka, there

is an organization that defends the rights of the younger generation. The non-government organization, *M.ART.IN-Club*, aims to improve the situation for youth by working

with schools and social institutions, youth and family agencies. With funding from the USAID-supported *Ukraine Citizen Action Network*, the club teaches young people how to fight for their rights in a unique manner. It has developed the *Oppressed Theater* method, a unusual psychological interactive theater forum designed by the Brazilian theater director, Augusto Boal.

In Brazil, this method was used to alleviate social tensions among the rural population. In Makiyivka, Viktoria Fedotova, a trained psychologist and Club activist, first used the method to support students' rights. The students of Makiyivka *Oppressed Theater* stage typical school situations and improvise ways for resolving conflicts. Real life situations are improvised by actors in the theater, who then switch places with the spectators. They in turn act out the roles of the aggressor and the victim, getting a chance to view the situation from both sides. Each “actor” can propose his/her personal conflict resolution immediately upon entering the role of a victim or aggressor. The important thing is to leave no one feeling indifferent.

Since the inception of the project, 159 high school students from 11 Makiyivka schools have learned the *Oppressed Theater* method. The group has given 16 performances in schools and government institutions and to orphans. In total, 555 spectators have watched the performances and had an opportunity to discuss and find alternative ways of resolving



High school students during a street performance. (Photo: Viktoria Fedotova)

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A baby-boy, born to a HIV-positive mother, gets a chance to live with his biological family (Photo: Zore Godeleyeva and Snizhana Svidinska)

Anna (20), discovered her HIV-positive status in the eighth month of her pregnancy. An orphan with no close relatives to help her, Anna was depressed, upset and scared, with no expectation of any external support. She had no documents proving her identity, nor income to live on. She had already decided that after delivering she would leave the baby at the maternity hospital.

Ukraine has one of the highest HIV incidence rates in Eastern Europe, and as a result must deal with the socio-economic consequences of the epidemic, including abandonment of children born to HIV+ mothers. The statistics are alarming. The number of children born to HIV+ mothers in Ukraine has reached almost 11,000, with the eastern and southern parts of the country most affected. The number of HIV+ mothers grows by 20% annually. Almost a quarter

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KEEPING WARM FROM BIRTH

Oleh most likely would have never predicted that he would one day perform a function that until recently was a mother's one. While his wife, Lyudmyla, was still under anesthesia after having given birth via Caesarean section in the Lutsk Maternity Hospital, their baby girl was put on his chest for a two-hour skin-to-skin contact session to keep her warm. Unlike adults, newborns need a room temperature of at least 25C°.

"It is hard to put this into words. It was magnificent. The baby felt good. The only thing I could not do was breastfeed her," explained Oleh while sharing his unforgettable memory.

Ukrainian maternity hospitals have had a history of problems with hypothermic babies. A 2003 needs assessment conducted in the city maternity hospitals of four pilot oblasts by the USAID-funded *Mother and Infant Health Project* (MIHP) showed that health care personnel didn't pay attention to such phenomenon as newborn hypothermia. Most medical professionals held the view that if they and the mother felt comfortable in the delivery rooms then newborns were feeling the same.

Many of the maternities where MIHP now works had rates of hypothermia among newborns that ranged from 41% to 90% before



A man warms his baby through skin-to-skin contact while his wife recovers from a Caesarean birth. (Photo: Oleksandr Golubov)

conditions were changed. This hypothermia was caused by cold delivery rooms, a failure to maintain warm-chain techniques, separation of baby from mother right after birth. The practice of tightly swaddled babies in hospital clothes with room temperature less than 25C° often also led to hypoglycemia,

breathing difficulties, infections and feeding complications among newborns. For low-weight and pre-term babies, hypothermia was a severe life threatening factor and at times even fatal.

MIHP introduced warm chain techniques and had mothers bring baby clothes from

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COUNSELING HELPS MOTHER CHANGE MIND

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of HIV+ pregnant women learn about their status during or after giving birth. They represent the most vulnerable social group, and the risk of child abandonment is greatest for them; every fifth child born to a HIV+ mother is left at the maternity hospital.

HIV+ pregnant women and young mothers often lack basic understanding of HIV and prevention of its transmission to the infant. Children are often abandoned as a result of family pressure, which is based on inaccurate information about HIV, or because the mother lacks any external support structures, and not necessarily because the mother fears she will infect the child.

The launch of the USAID-supported *Prevention of Abandonment of Children Born to HIV+ Mothers* (MAMA+) Project in the summer 2005 has slowly helped to change the situation. MAMA+ seeks to create systems, capacity and commitment in Ukraine to keep children born to HIV+ mothers within their biological families. It provides comprehensive psychological, social, medical and legal support for HIV+ mothers and their families in Donetsk, Kyiv and the Crimea. MAMA+ is implemented by the *Doctors of the World -USA* in close partnership with the *All-Ukrainian Network*

of PLWHA, and strongly relies on the referral network of its local partners, including city maternity hospitals, regional prenatal and AIDS centers, and babies' homes. Multi-disciplinary case management teams of two social workers, two psychologists, a medical worker and a lawyer identify and help young

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HIV+ mothers in need.

When Anna contacted MAMA+ last October, the project's social workers arranged for her to be admitted to Maternity Hospital #4, where she stayed until her delivery. The project staff visited Anna regularly, providing psychological support, medication, food and other necessities for her and her future baby.

Until she actually gave birth, Anna was determined to abandon her baby to the

state. She did not see how she would survive with a little baby added to her burden. After five weeks of intense attention and comprehensive support from the MAMA+ project staff prior to delivery, Anna felt much more confident and decided to give life with her newborn a try. Anna's healthy baby boy was born on December 17, 2005, and was named Nikolai.

Today Anna has hope. She has returned to work as a saleswoman, and has resumed living in her old apartment, along with another young mother who has agreed to sit with Anna's baby while she is at work. Addressing long-term support structures for Anna, MAMA+ psychologists also are paying special attention to supporting Anna's effort to develop a relationship with her extended family. Anna says that

now she sees a way to go on living. She believes that without MAMA+ support she would not have been able to keep the baby or even keep herself going. Anna has become a more confident young mother with a future before her.

As of March 31, 2006, MAMA+ has helped 58 children born to HIV+ mothers to stay in their biological families and receive needed support.

FAMILY-BASED CARE SERVICES HELP CHILDREN



Olena Roshke, a foster mom, "Father's House" charitable foundation, Svyatoshyynkyi rayon, Kyiv (Photo: A. Fedortsiv)

A Victory for Peremoha

In early 2006, *Peremoha*, a charitable organization based in Brovary, Kyiv Oblast, which works with substance abusers and HIV-affected people, received a phone call from a local maternity hospital. A hospital staff worker wanted to refer a young woman in the last term of pregnancy, who had just found out she was HIV-positive. A social worker from *Peremoha*, which had received a six-month grant from FCP in December 2005 to establish an HIV/AIDS support center in Brovary, left for the hospital immediately.

Tatiana (not the client's real name) was confused and depressed. She was contemplating leaving her newborn child at the hospital. Much of what she knew about the HIV infection was incorrect. As it turned out her perceptions of the possible consequences of HIV-infection were vastly exaggerated.

The social worker spent time with Tatiana, explaining to her the nature and effects of the HIV infection upon adults and children, and left some reading materials. Two days later, Tatiana came to a second meeting looking a lot more cheerful. She mentioned that she had bought some new things for the baby. Two weeks later she called and told the *Peremoha* staff member that she had given birth to a beautiful baby boy.

During a visit to see Tatiana after she had given birth, the social worker found the new mother cup feeding her son lovingly. Tatiana said she had discussed the situation with her husband, and they had both come to a decision to keep and raise their son. Tatiana and the baby are home now, while the *Peremoha* staff continues to provide advice and support to her family, including providing formula, diapers and clothing for the baby, made possible through FCP grant funds.

Zoya's Home Gets a Facelift

In March 2006, the Brovary Rayon specialized family support unit received a referral from the rayon Service on Minors. The letter told of a young mother, Zoya, who had recently given birth to a baby girl but was unable to take her home. The pediatrician, who had made a home visit, had refused to

The USAID-sponsored Families for Children Program (FCP), implemented by Holt International, was launched in October 2004 to build a continuum of family-based care services for children outside of family care or at risk of losing families, which includes four service areas: family preservation, foster care, family-type homes and domestic adoption. Currently FCP works in five localities in the Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Cherkassy oblasts of Ukraine.

An integral part of the FCP is support to children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. The program's goal is to build the capacity of local communities to prevent and alleviate the impact of HIV/AIDS on children, mitigate the stigma and discrimination faced by these children and increase the number of HIV-affected children in family-based care.

To date, 1,152 people, including decision makers, service providers, parents and children have participated in various trainings on family-based care, prevention of early child abandonment and other subjects, conducted by FCP grantees in three pilot regions, while 284 children and 322 families have received psychosocial support services made possible through FCP grant program. Here are some of the ways in which the program has helped Ukrainians:

release the mother and child after having found unfit living conditions for a newborn baby and had turned to the local Service on Minors for help.

The previous October, the *League of Social Workers* Kyiv Chapter, a professional association of social workers that provides expert support and professional development programs for social work practitioners, had received a six-month FCP grant to establish specialized family support (SFS) units in Brovary Rayon. A family support unit was established at Brovary Rayon Center for Social Services and five more units were created in local villages, bringing much-needed support to remote rural communities. The 15 staff members of the newly-established SFS underwent training on effective client counseling techniques, conflict management and building community-based services.

The SFS responded to the letter about Zoya and her family by sending a family support unit manager and social worker to visit them. They found out that Zoya's newborn daughter was the fifth child in the family, and the family's house was in very poor condition requiring urgent repair.

The social workers discussed the situation with the family and offered help in repairing the house. Zoya's sister agreed to look after the new baby while Zoya and her husband Yuriy cleaned the house, put up wall-paper and painted the windows with social workers' support. The SFS workers also contacted Yuriy's employer and arranged for him to provide flooring material for the house. In addition, they provided clothing, bedding, toiletries and toys for the family.

In mid-April the family was able to bring the baby home. The SFS staff continues to stay in contact and provide support to the family.

Sunshine Provides Children's Summer Camp

Sunshine, an international charity fund that is also based in Brovary rayon, helps street children and children in need. It operates a professional rehabilitation center for street children in the village of Trebukhiv, providing family-preservation services to at-risk families and developing foster care programs.

In the summer of 2005, FCP awarded a partnership grant to *Sunshine* to support its annual summer camp for 93 children from at-risk families of Brovary rayon and the re-



Camp participants set up a cableway to cross a river (Photo: O. Galchynska)

sidents of the rehabilitation center. The aim was to identify the main problems these children face and develop early intervention strategies to strengthen the families and give the kids at the *Sunshine* Rehabilitation Center a healthy, alternative environment.

Each year summer camp participants, together with their caregivers and teachers, clean the area and set up the camp. They help with cooking, laundry as well as educational activities and entertainment. *Sunshine* staff and volunteers get to know the children and use the camp program as a springboard to provide the most suitable services for children, including foster placements or family reunification and preservation activities.

GIRL RESCUES SELF, THEN SIBLINGS FROM SLAVERY

Halyna, 11, lived with her younger brother and sister along with their alcoholic mother and stepfather in a small city in Vynnytsya Oblast. The children's lives changed forever when one day their mother sold them to traffickers. Halyna and her siblings were moved around from city to city, and ended up begging in the streets of Russia.

The three often suffered from hunger, physical abuse and exposure to the harsh weather. Each day each child was required to bring back a pre-determined amount of money. If they did not meet their quota, they were beaten. For two years they lived on the streets of Russia, begging and hungry, and never attending school; a dark and difficult childhood.

During their time in Russia, a 17-year-old girl joined their group. Unwilling to suffer any longer, the 17-year-old and Halyna decided to escape and get help. To better the chance of success, Halyna had to make the difficult decision to leave her younger brother and sister behind, promising to return.

The two older girls escaped successfully and hid from their captors by running and living in basements. Eventually the Russian militia found them, and the two girls were moved to a shelter in Belgorod. There, Halyna told authorities about her younger brother and sister still begging in the streets.

Fortunately, she was able to remember her captor's last address, which helped the authorities to find her siblings and reunite them, and allowed her to keep her promise to them. Once they were together again, the



USAID-supported Counter-Trafficking Program Logo (Courtesy of IOM)

Russian militia informed law enforcement authorities in Ukraine and transported Halyna and her siblings home.

After arriving in Ukraine, the Ministry of Interior's Counter Trafficking Unit of Vynnytsya oblast contacted a local non-governmental organization (NGO), *Progressive Women*, which has extensive experience in counter-trafficking activities in the area. The

NGO brought the traumatized children to the USAID-supported *International Organization for Migration* (IOM) Kyiv Medical Rehabilitation Center to address their medical and psycho-social needs.

According to IOM Kyiv, in 2001-2005, 110 out of 2,727 trafficked person were minors. In 2005, of 39 minors rescued from traffickers, 28 had been used in prostitution, seven had been forced to beg and four had been in forced labor.

The main country of destination for Ukrainian under-age victims is the Russian Federation, with Turkey and Poland following. As a rule, under-age victims of trafficking are exposed to severe violence, multiple rapes, compulsory prostitution and forced labor, all traumatic experiences. For this reason, it is essential that each victim, without exception, receives urgent and adequate help for overcoming the consequences of the psychological and physical traumas.

International, non-governmental, civil society and faith-based organizations as well as the Government of Ukraine are collaborating to eradicate trafficking in Ukraine. More than 60 non-governmental organizations - partners of IOM - are working to increase public awareness and prevention. They aid people like Halyna and her siblings and help to return them to a normal life.

Halyna, now 13, together with her sister and brother, are currently residing in an orphanage. They are now in good health and attend school regularly.

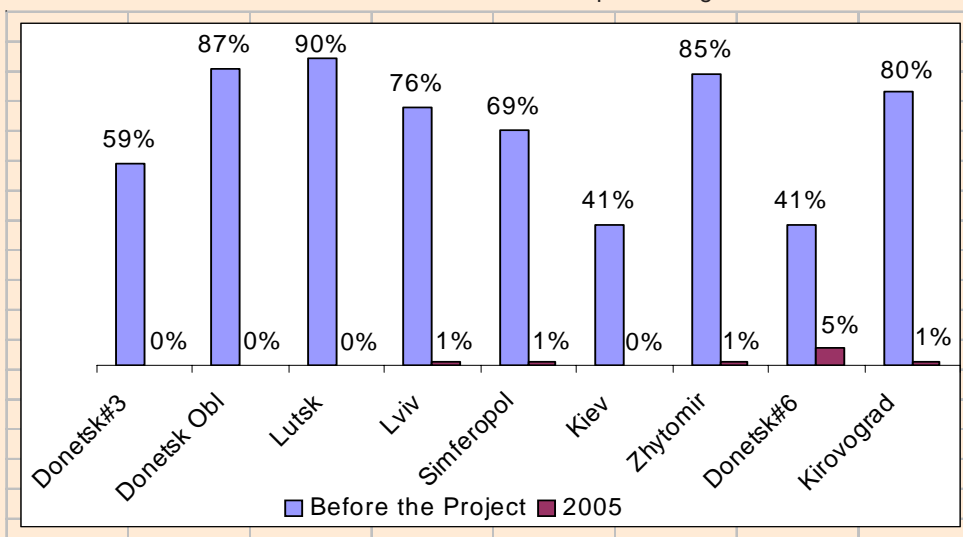
SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT ELIMINATES HYPOTHERMIA AMONG NEWBORNS

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home, which dropped the rate of hypothermia among newborns in the Lutsk maternity hospital from 90% to 0%. The initiation of mother and newborn skin-to-skin contact right after birth not only warmed the newborn, but allowed them to easily latch-on to the mother's breast and obtain those first

precious drops of the mother's colostrums so vital for raising a baby's immunity.

When the mother is unable to warm the child, this function, as in Oleh's case, falls to the father. It also helps the entire family begin developing those strong bonds that will keep them together.



Graph reflects hypothermia drop at MIHP sites from 2003 to 2005 (Courtesy of John Snow Inc.)

THE THEATER TREATS SCHOOL PROBLEMS

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the problems as presented on stage. A public awareness campaign involving teachers, artists and community activists on eliminating abuse in schools has also been conducted. Forty-eight on-air shows on 3 FM stations have reached over 500,000 radio listeners.

M.ART.IN has sent the results of the Amnesty International questionnaire to five government officials, who said they now look at the issue of defending school children's rights differently, and the Makiyivka city council has asked the NGO to continue its work with teachers.

Teachers have begun to understand the impact of their behavior on students as well. Since the project's conclusion in 2004, 90% of teachers in Makiyivka admit that violence is a part of the school system, and 26% have said the atmosphere in classrooms depends mostly on teachers. Also important, children's attitudes have changed: 90% of *Oppressed Theater* participants have changed their view on self-respect and now acknowledge the need to help others defend their rights.